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INFLUENCES EXERTED BY AGRICULTURAL FAIRS¹

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Introduction

Now that the better utilization of organized agencies for the improvement of agriculture is being generally considered, attention is naturally directed to the county fair association as a force which, if properly directed and developed, might be of great service, since it provides a local agency in each county that is directly interested in the development of the agriculture of that particular county and possesses the requisite legal power to act in directions that it may deem best for accomplishing its purposes. There are over 1,200 county fair associations in the United States, with a registered membership of approximately 250,000. Their annual gross receipts amount to about \$6,500,000, and their expenditures for premiums to almost \$2,500,000.

An investigation in 1910 by the farmers' institute specialist of the Office of Experiment Stations into the operations of the county fair associations of the United States shows that there were 1,203 of these associations in existence in 1909. Replies to inquiries were received from 465 of these organizations, or 38.65 per cent of the whole number, representing thirty-seven states.

The registered membership of the associations reporting was 95,321, and the total attendance in 1909 was 6,103,227. The total receipts were:

From gate receipts	\$1,331,594.09
From concessions	394,081.75
From county appropriations	23,270.38
From state appropriations	273,327.52
From other sources	503,476.31
Total	\$2,525,750.05

¹ This article is a reprint of a portion of Circular No. 109, Office of Experiment Stations, United States Department of Agriculture.

These associations offered in premiums \$1,226,214.18, and paid in premiums in 1909, \$994,265.26. If the remaining 61.35 per cent of the whole number of associations not reporting average in attendance, receipts, premiums offered and paid equally with the 38.65 per cent reporting, the total for the entire 1,203 societies would be, in membership, 246,600; attendance, 15,791,000; gross income, \$6,534,900; amount paid in premiums, \$2,572,400.

Reports were also received from eighteen state associations, holding fairs in 1909, as follows:

Total attendance	1,490,029
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Income from—	
Gate receipts	\$630,554
Concessions	193,200
State appropriations	361,214
Other sources	244,114
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Total	\$1,429,082

The amount offered in premiums by these state fair associations in 1909 was \$367,809. The amount paid in premiums was \$270,187.

Present Need for Efficient Local Agricultural Associations

That need exists for proper local associations to aid in the improvement of rural conditions is admitted by all who have studied the country problem.

There is, first of all, the great fundamental need of increasing production. This of itself is sufficient reason for the existence of organizations in each county to give intelligent attention to soils, fertilizers, animals, crops, tillage, moisture supply, drainage, seed selection, fruit culture, the farm wood lot, and the many other items directly affecting agricultural production.

Then there is the need for the improvement of the highways, the consolidation of rural schools, the adaptation of the courses of study in these schools to country life, the betterment of agricultural homes and their surroundings, the economical marketing of products and purchasing of farm supplies, etc.

Agricultural educational institutions, particularly the agricultural colleges and experiment stations, are looking for more efficient means for reaching country people with agricultural information,

and now that extension departments are being organized in all of these colleges, the need for efficient local institutions in each county to act as centers from which to operate is very apparent. The county fair associations are already organized as public agencies for the dissemination of agricultural information, and it is only necessary to strengthen their organization and work in order to give them a larger and more important place in our rapidly developing system of agricultural education.

The county fair has already been found to be a most valuable assistant to the agricultural college and experiment station wherever its services have been utilized, and the college in turn has greatly strengthened the fair association through its support in furnishing educational exhibits and skilled demonstrators and judges at the annual shows, and by setting a high standard along all lines for rural betterment.

In response to inquiries sent out to the agricultural colleges and experiment stations of the United States it is found that out of forty-seven states and territories reporting, thirteen colleges and five stations sent separate exhibits to state or county fairs in 1908, and that eighteen other colleges and stations united their material into joint exhibits and sent them to state or county fairs. Many of these collections were very elaborate, including beef and dairy cattle, swine, sheep, poultry, fruits, vegetables, forestry products, nursery stock, models of farm buildings, samples of cakes, bread, canned and dried fruits, preserves, pickles, samples of needle work, exhibits of stenographic work, typewriting, samples of business letters, examination papers, charts; also specimens of feeds and forage crops, model dairy plans, plans for model farms, specimens of insects and fungus growths, tables giving the composition and yields of various crops, samples of soils, spraying apparatus; forge, lathe, and hand work in wood and metal, and similar articles exhibiting the character of the educational work of the institution. These exhibits were in charge of expert demonstrators to explain their characteristics and reply to inquiries respecting the work of the college or station. One institution had nine demonstrators at a single fair. In all cases the exhibits were of an educational character, and of use in teaching the subjects of agriculture, domestic science, or mechanic arts.

Farming people particularly were interested in these exhibits

and their appreciation and value have been such as to prompt the college authorities to continue and enlarge them. The colleges and stations were represented during that year at one hundred and one fairs, being limited in the number only by the amount of money available for bearing the expense.

Among the advantages claimed by the institutions from their exhibitions at these fairs are:

(1) Opportunity to meet farmers personally and explain the work of the institution.

(2) Opportunity to secure co-operators in demonstration work.

(3) Opportunity for the college to conduct agricultural schools and short courses and demonstrations while the exhibition is in progress.

(4) Opportunity to initiate new movements for the improvement of agriculture.

(5) Opportunity for the education of fair managers in the conduct of agricultural exhibitions.

(6) Opportunity for collecting into one place the results of field demonstrations for the inspection of the public.

(7) Providing a place for the exhibition of the results of contest work by school children and country youth.

(8) Enabling the college and station to secure the names and addresses of representative farmers and of young people with whom to correspond in disseminating agricultural information, and in securing co-operation in projects for rural improvement.

The Fair Redirected and Enlarged

All that the present fair association needs for immediate action in the wider field now open is a change of view as to its mission and scope and a practical plan for carrying on its work. Its activities need to be redirected and enlarged to fit the association to take advantage of the opportunities for aiding rural betterment that lie before it. If it is to be a leader in rural betterment its organization and methods must be carefully outlined in advance to be in accord with the conditions that control success in such enterprises. As careful a study should be made by the management, of the needs of farming people as well as of their peculiarities and temperament, as if those interested in the fair were about to invest in a department store or engage in the manufacture on a large scale of an article or articles intended for general use.

The fair even if assisted by the state will be largely dependent upon public patronage for its success. If public patronage is to be secured and held the fair as a whole must be made sufficiently interesting to attract those whose presence is desired. In doing this it can not descend to the use of low or questionable methods or to cheap, vulgar, or tawdry shows no matter how great the crowd these may draw or how remunerative they may be. Its attractions must be of a character that will elevate and instruct, or if for entertainment the exhibition must be free from everything that suggests evil, ridicules purity, or tends to deceive, defraud, or vulgarize the public.

The fair that is to be a worthy leader and is to meet the needs of country people must be strong, clean, full of interest, well managed, and in entire sympathy with country life. It must first of all and above all be loyal to its own constituency, the agricultural public, and not be swerved from serving them in the most effective way by any influence or set of influences that it may encounter, however enticing.

Exhibits

The fair in its main feature is an exhibition. Its character is therefore determined almost entirely by the grade and variety of the articles that it displays. Since its main purpose is to improve rural life in all of its phases, the exhibits should be of a kind that will contribute to that end. The basis, therefore, of the fair should be exhibits from the farm, the garden, the wood lot, horticultural exhibits, household exhibits, poultry, domestic animals, agricultural implements and machinery, models of country homes with sanitary surroundings and modern conveniences, forest products, manufactured articles, and educational exhibits of methods, courses of study, school buildings and grounds, and school gardens adapted to rural conditions.

The entries for premiums should be open to individuals, to institutions, and to communities. A brief statement made out upon a card should be attached to each exhibit showing by whom it is exhibited, the feature it is intended to display, with such additional information as may be important to a proper understanding and appreciation of its use and economic value.

Each class of exhibits should be set up by an expert and be attended by some one capable of explaining the quality and uses

of the several articles in his section. Whenever possible the exhibitor of the article or animal should be present in person during the fair and call attention to the valuable features of the things that he is exhibiting. If samples only are shown of larger quantities on hand for sale, they should be accompanied by a statement of the quantity that is thus available and the price, with a guarantee that the goods to be delivered shall be true to sample.

Judging

The judging for premiums ought to be by disinterested experts, and every award should be accompanied with a statement showing why it was given, and the judges should be ready to make a public defense, if called upon, in support of their conclusions. The state department of agriculture might have lists of persons on file certified as capable judges in the various groups of exhibits, who would be available for service at county fairs at a stated compensation.

Demonstrations

Certain stated periods each day should be devoted to demonstrations to be held at different places on the grounds. These demonstrations might be the packing of fruit; the use of the Babcock test; spraying operations, including the mixing of sprays, as well as their application; killing, dressing, and packing poultry for market; sanitary handling of milk; transplanting, budding, and pruning trees; seed selection; germination tests; laying out and planting garden plats; stock judging; canning, preserving, and drying fruits; cheese making; butter making; testing agricultural machinery; disinfecting rooms, stables, and clothing; conducting cooking schools, dressmaking and millinery schools; demonstration plat work; plowing matches, and similar contests.

These demonstrations can be made valuable features of the fair depending upon the skill of those in charge of them. Machinery in motion, processes in course of performance, and other forms of effort in actual operation attract attention and are never-failing sources of interest.

By stopping all other exercises and concentrating attention upon the demonstration features for an hour or two each day, variety will be given to the exhibition, and valuable information can be imparted free from interruption or distraction by other exercises.

Contests

Contests in crop production, animal breeding and feeding, and other agricultural operations should be organized early in the year, the results to be exhibited at the fair. Persons entering such contests should be required to declare in advance their intention to compete, in order to shut out crops or animals that are the result not of skill but of mere accident or chance.

In all such contests accurate data should accompany each report showing the items of cost in producing the article and the methods pursued. The premiums offered should be for results secured under conditions possible to every farmer of intelligence, and be for operations above those on a miniature scale. To exhibit ten ears of corn out of a crop of forty acres is no evidence of superior farming, but to exhibit ten superior acres out of such an area is a real test of skill and worthy of proper recognition. For persons in control of farms the contests should be in operations of sufficient size to require the exercise of more than ordinary exertion and skill. For boys and girls they could be adapted to suit the means at their command.

Entertainments and Amusements

Trials of speed, acrobatic and sleight-of-hand performances, exhibitions of trained animals, moving pictures, the merry-go-round, military drill, games of ball, foot races, and other athletic sports, balloon ascensions, and similar entertainments are all unobjectionable when properly controlled, and provide entertainment to those who come to spend an idle hour. They should, however, not be permitted to interfere with the main exhibition and the more serious purposes of the fair. The association must first of all be loyal to the industry that it represents. To insure this its entertainments should be restricted to certain hours, and when presented opportunity should be given to all to witness and to enjoy them.

All disreputable shows, gambling devices, and loud coarse fakirs with monstrosities to exhibit, should be rigidly excluded from the grounds. Nothing that the most refined and modest woman might not see or hear should be admitted. All others ought to be shut out as unworthy of a place in a self-respecting community, and the superintendent of this department should be held to

strict accountability for the enforcement of this rule, and an adequate police force should be at his disposal for the purpose.

The expenses attendant upon the presentation of the open air entertainment features of the fair could be met by the fair association, and for this a specific appropriation might be made. Such in-door sports or entertainments as the merry-go-round, moving pictures, animal exhibits, and sleight-of-hand performances, can be permitted to charge an entrance fee, the amount to be agreed upon with the managers of the fair.

State and County Aid

An assured income is a necessity if the fair is to do its work efficiently and expand as the needs of the country develop. State or county aid, or both, is essential in any system of fair organization that is to serve the people and improve their methods. The lack of such an income is responsible for the presence of most of the objectionable features admitted to fairs at present, and for the consequent loss by the fair both of prestige and support by farming people. The management must be independent of need of the money that fakirs and gamblers offer for the privilege of swindling visitors.

Grants of money to the fair association by the county or the state are therefore a necessity without which the best and most useful type of the fair can not exist. These grants should be carefully guarded so as to stimulate and not enfeeble effort on the part of local people, and to insure that the funds are not used in promoting worthless projects or visionary schemes. The representatives of the state boards of agriculture appointed to see to the proper conduct of the county fair should also be charged with making inquiry into its use of the public funds, and if these are squandered or used in violation of law, subsequent appropriations should be withheld until the portions so misused shall have been refunded to the state or county and satisfactory assurance given that future grants will be properly expended.

Premiums

The character of the premiums awarded may vary indefinitely, and be in the form of cash, medals, certificates, or other recognition of merit according to the importance of the display and its

place in rural industry. The award should be for excellence, and no matter how many articles are exhibited in a class or how few, no premium should be given unless deserved.

The competition is not so much with others as with excellence. The exhibits, therefore, should be rated and the award made as this is approached. Accordingly, for the information of competitors, there should be published with each class of exhibits the requirements that will be considered by the judges, and as far as possible the percentage for each requirement as it enters into the make-up of a standard article or animal in that class.

Special premiums should be offered for new methods, or for new plants, animals, or implements introduced and of superior excellence. Similar special premiums should be offered for successful farms, for special crops, or for herds of animals reared by the owner on any farm, and for superior orchards and gardens; for school buildings, including also churchyards, country cemeteries, and other items that can not be shown at the fair, but are worthy of special recognition as evidences of intelligent treatment or marked success.

Water Supply

An abundant supply of wholesome water is most important, and the fair grounds should not be located where this can not be had. Where connection with a town water system is not possible a reservoir supplied either from springs or from a well is a necessity. The pumping engine should be of sufficient capacity to throw a large quantity of water in case of fire or other emergency.

Season for Holding Fairs

Successful fairs are being held at all seasons of the year—midwinter, spring, midsummer, and autumn—depending upon the object to be attained and the accommodations. The midwinter fair must, of necessity, be indoors. For this, closed and heated accommodations must be provided sufficient for the exhibits and for the visitors who attend. The exhibits at the winter fair are usually confined to live stock, seeds, grains, poultry, florist's plants, and exhibits along the lines of domestic science and household art. Those in the spring show implements, machinery, nursery stock, vegetable seeds, hotbed plants, fertilizers, dairy and creamery products, household furniture, and samples of grain, such as wheat, rye,

barley, oats, corn, clover, and timothy seeds for spring planting, exhibited as specimens of larger quantities held in store for sale.

The summer fairs exhibit the products of agriculture of the season, as summer fruits, garden vegetables, grain and forage crops, live stock and poultry, household articles, manufactures, agricultural implements and machinery, samples of grains for autumn seeding, berries, school gardens, forest plantations, model samples of school grounds, experiment plats, seed testing on trial plats, stock judging, testing dairy cows, and similar exhibits. The summer fair partakes largely of the nature of a harvest-home picnic or summer outing, and includes lectures and addresses by eminent agriculturists and others interested in rural betterment.

The autumn fairs are held in most of the states in the months of September and October, and comprise a collection of the products of the year. They are the principal fairs of the season.

Paid Secretary

If the fair association is to fulfill its mission, its influence will have to be felt for more than the few days during which the exhibition is held. It will have to be an active force the year round. Before this can be done there must be a paid secretary who can devote all of his time to the affairs of the association. The secretary should be an expert in agricultural matters and not a mere clerk with little or no practical or theoretical knowledge of this industry.

How Shall County Fair Associations Be Induced to Undertake This Work

Many associations are now ready for what has been here outlined, and will be glad to undertake the work if a practicable plan is shown. Others will need urging. This will require the personal efforts of organizers to meet their managers and show them precisely how they can do at least some of the things that are needed, leaving the others, if necessary, for future consideration after the movement is well under way.

Responsibility for and the initiative in this work might be given to the state boards and departments of agriculture. Agents could be employed by them to visit the several counties to organize new fair associations, and to reorganize the old. Later, these

agents should revisit the societies to see that they understand what is proposed and to assist them when necessary in carrying out the project. This is a kind of service that the State departments of agriculture are specially fitted to undertake, and, in securing valuable results to agriculture, is as promising a field of effort as any other that they have hitherto attempted.

Most of the state departments or boards of agriculture have interested themselves in the local fair associations very little beyond collecting copies of their premium lists and getting records of attendance and the amount of the gate receipts. If they will devote some of their time and money to sending out an expert or several experts to organize county fairs and to advise with their officers and aid them in carrying on their work, they will not only be increasing their usefulness to the farming industry, but their action will also be in direct keeping with the purpose of the Commonwealth in establishing state departments for the benefit of agriculture.